



NATURAL AREAS NEWSLETTER



Issue Number 2

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Natural Area Management Plans Initiated in the Green Area

Art Peter, Superintendent of the Bow/Crow Forest and Dave Laing of the Slave Lake Forest have initiated the development of management plans for the BEEHIVE and HONDO NATURAL AREAS.

These plans will guide the long-term protection, use and management of these sites. As volunteer stewards for Beehive, Cowley Forest Products and the Alberta Wilderness Association are invited and encouraged to participate in plan preparation. Likewise, the volunteer steward for Hondo, Dr. George La Roi of the Botany Department, University of Alberta, is involved in developing the management plan for that site.

The Alberta Forest Service not only is actively involved in the management of Natural Areas and the Volunteer Steward Program, but also has nominated several new sites. For example, Dan Slaught (Lac La Biche Forest) and Dave Brown (now of the Grande Prairie Forest) nominated the Boivin site, a 43 km² large open fen with ice-cored peat mounds and collapse scars; and Al McFadyen (of the Edson Forest) jointly with the Alberta Speleological Society, nominated the spectacular Cadomin Cave, located near Hinton.

Presently, there are 38 reserved and designated Natural Areas in the "Green Area" of Alberta. This Green Area is the 400,000 km² of forest land of the Northern and Eastern Slopes portions of Alberta that is managed by the Alberta Forest Service.

Edmonton Head Office staff Susan Calp, Lorne Fisher and Laurel Zuk coordinate Natural Area activities for the Alberta Forest Service.

"With continued enthusiasm from field staff and the identification of interested people through the Volunteer Steward Program, there will continue to be more new Natural Areas in the Green Area," said Lorne Fisher, of the Alberta Forest Service.

Beaverhill Lake : A Success Story

In spring and fall, hundreds of thousands of birds stop at Beaverhill Lake to rest before continuing their migration. The importance of Beaverhill Lake as a waterfowl staging area is internationally recognized and it draws a large number of local and international birders as well as waterfowl hunters.

Located 71 km east of Edmonton, Beaverhill Lake is surrounded by private lands and small parcels of public land, most of which are under grazing leases. As the reputation of the lake spread, drawing more and more visitors, problems developed. Most of the access routes to the lake were not signed. When people were unable to find suitable access trails to the lake, some attempted to cross wet fields and inevitably got their vehicles stuck. There were also problems with unintentional trespassing and with pasture gates being left open.

As a result, Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife initiated an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) as the first phase in a two-step planning process to identify land use priorities around Beaverhill Lake. The plan was completed in 1981 and identified areas around the lake for which agriculture, wildlife, recreation or some combination of the three should receive emphasis.

The second phase of this planning process was to focus on individual parcels of public lands and develop local plans for each. Gerry Ehlert, Public Lands Division, St. Paul is coordinating the development of these local plans. Each one is developed by a team co-ordinated by Gerry Ehlert and made up of the lease or disposition holder, a Fish and Wildlife Division representative, a Public Lands Division representative and interested private agencies such as Ducks Unlimited. As the plan for each parcel is done, the main theme set out for the area in the IRP is taken into consideration, then detailed guidelines are developed. Completion of all the local plans is targeted for 1990 - 1991.

Those lands with wildlife and conservation themes have been designated as the Beaverhill Natural Area, and the Beaverhill Bird Observatory is the volunteer steward. On the other public lands, the local plans provide

guidelines for improved livestock grazing; maintaining winter cover for deer; maintaining or enhancing waterfowl nesting; and for identifying and upgrading recreational access points. From what could have been a situation in which recreation users and agricultural users were pitted against each other has developed into a cooperative planning approach.

Dear Readers,

In the second issue of our newsletter we have included articles on two innovative programs that offer unique ways to become actively involved in our natural history. The Alberta Bird Atlas and the Alberta Flowering Date Survey provide the opportunity to get outdoors and enjoy the beautiful spring.

You will also find in this issue, the first of a series of feature articles that will profile volunteer stewards. Myrna Pearman, President of the Red Deer River Naturalist Society (RDRN) is interviewed.

To bring you up-to-date with the progress of the volunteer program we now have 39 volunteers for 45 sites. The response has been wonderful and is greatly appreciated.

Sandra Myers

Sandra Myers
Volunteer Steward Co-ordinator

WILDFLOWERS BURSTING INTO BLOOM

An Alberta Flowering Date Survey

Dear Natural Area Observers,

Would you like to learn more about wildflowers? Here is an opportunity to record valuable native plant information for your unique area. Join a province-wide group of observers who note when certain wildflowers in their part of Alberta start to flower. Dates from natural habitats such as yours are especially valuable.

Plants are highly sensitive weather instruments, responding to temperature, rainfall, wind, and sunshine. The timing of their flowering reflects the earliness or lateness of a particular spring. Collected over the years, these dates can help us schedule farm or garden planting to get maximum yields and also predict insect outbreaks. As well it will provide baseline ecological data for your area.

Alberta's native people also watched for flowering. Plains Indians used the blooming time of Golden Bean as an indicator that the buffalo bulls were at their prime for the spring hunt. Later, settlers used the same indicator as a "go-ahead" date to plant their crops.

With the flowering dates from observers around Alberta, maps of the "green wave" of spring are made. Join us! As one of our observers you'll be kept informed of the results of the survey. You will be able to compare the earliness of your area to the rest of the province and will also be making an important contribution to the knowledge and wise management of your natural area!

Discover the life and lore of 15 native plants including Prairie Crocus, Golden Bean, Saskatoon, Wood Lily, Wolf

Willow and Fireweed! For your copy of a colourful brochure with photographs as well as descriptions of the wildflowers and how to observe them, write:

Wildflower Survey,
Department of Botany,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2E9.

Elisabeth Beaubien
March, 1988

ALBERTA NATIVE PLANTS COUNCIL HOSTS RARE PLANTS WORKSHOP

On February 15, 1988, over fifty people attended the Alberta Native Plants Council's (ANPC) first workshop on Rare Alberta Plants.

The morning session included a series of speakers presenting overviews of rare plant protection efforts at the International, National and Provincial levels. The afternoon portion was broken up into four sessions which included: Role of the Non-Professional; Research; Education, and; Protection and Management.

The workshop started and ended with impressive audio-visual slide shows and talks by noted Alberta naturalists Cleave Wershler and Cliff Wallis.

"The workshop was an outstanding success;" said Dr. Peter Achuff, Chairman of ANPC and chairman of the workshop, "The level of interest expressed both by the number of attendees and by the comments we received is very encouraging. ANPC will now be proceeding with an Action Plan to further raise the public profile of native plants in general." For further information, contact Alberta Native Plants Council, Box 4524, Station SE Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5G4.



Western Blue Flag
(*IRIS MISSOURIENSIS*)

This rare wild iris has showy blue flowers that bloom on stems 20-50 cm high. Its range is restricted to only a few locations in southwestern Alberta. A recent contract commissioned by the Natural Areas Program, the Alberta Forest Service & the World Wildlife Fund's Wild West Program has identified the Western Blue Flag as one of three priority species requiring a recovery and monitoring plan. Alberta's first rare plant monitoring project is being conducted on this species.

Drawing by John Maywood



STEWARD PROFILE : RED DEER RIVER NATURALISTS

The Red Deer River Naturalists (formerly the Alberta Naturalist Society) is the oldest naturalist organization in the province. Present membership totals about 300 persons with individuals scattered throughout central Alberta. The Society has a core group of about 50 active members and a dedicated, fourteen member executive with Myrna Pearman as president.

Question(Q): *To what extent has the RDRN been involved with the Volunteer Steward Program?*

Myrna Pearman(M.P.): To date the club has sponsored three natural areas: Innisfail, Butcher Creek and Sylvan Lake. In addition to these sites, individual members are stewards for three other natural areas. We have reviewed and provided input into site management plans and have worked closely with Greg Wray and Barry Cole, Public Lands Division, Red Deer in erecting signs and fencing out a parking area at Butcher Creek.

Q: *What is planned in the future for these sites?*

M.P.: We plan to tie in the site inspections and cleanup during our summer outings. We will be keeping a close eye on each of the sites and will make management suggestions if and when we feel it is necessary.

Q: *What is your opinion of the Volunteer Steward Program?*

M.P.: The Program is a grass roots project that helps to protect some of our natural heritage. The personal rewards and satisfaction that individuals get more than offsets the time and effort required to complete site inspections and undertake any necessary site maintenance. It gives a sense of responsibility and enjoyment to our members in knowing that they are helping to conserve habitat and that they have some input into the protection and use of these areas. In some cases it would be useful if we had more authority to ensure the protection of these natural areas (ie. poaching, vandalism, and inappropriate land uses, etc.).

Q: *The RDRN have also been extremely active in other areas. What are some of the other projects that the club has been involved with?*

M.P.: An exciting new program that we initiated just this past December is the Habitat Steward Program. It is a cooperative effort with Alberta Government Telephones (AGT), who have donated funds for attractive gate signs. The signs are available to individual landowners in Central Alberta who conserve, on their own initiative and at their own expense at least five acres of wildlife habitat. We feel that it is a small gesture and a way to say thank you to landowners who practice habitat conservation. These individuals are not recognized nearly enough for the contribution they make to wildlife.

Q: *What has been the response to this program?*

M.P.: Since December we have distributed 30 signs. The program is spread by word of mouth with residents nominating their neighbors. We plan to inform other naturalist societies of the program and invite them to participate. A naturalist organization in Kelowna is

considering implementing this program in the Okanagan Valley.

Q: *What are some of the Society's other projects?*

M.P.: We have received a grant from the Wildlife 87 Committee to revise, print and provincially distribute the Backyard Wildlife Habitat booklet that we produced last year. This booklet encourages landowners to consider wildlife in designing their backyard and it also shows them what to do to make it more attractive and useful to wildlife. The booklet will be on sale in mid April.

We also have a cooperative project underway with Alberta Fish and Wildlife to protect great blue heron nesting sites. Volunteers wrap the nest trees with wire to protect them from being cut by beaver. Off duty Fish and Wildlife officers and our members are also constructing artificial nesting structures for herons. We are trying to get the use of a helicopter next year to erect these in suitable, inaccessible locations.

Besides that, our club has representatives on the Ellis Bird Farm, Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary and Red Deer Museum Management boards and of course FAN. We also produce an occasional newspaper, attend conferences and lobby and write letters regarding conservation issues.

I should also mention that \$1 of our \$12 membership fee goes to The Buck for Wildlife Program to be used in non-game projects.

Q: *I believe that your club has entered into an agreement with a private landowner to protect habitat. Can you give us some background information on it?*

M.P.: One of our members was aware of some sensitive wetlands near Lacombe that he felt should be protected. We approached the landowner and over the course of many months were able to negotiate a 10 year private conservancy lease. We think that this is the first such agreement in Canada undertaken by a Society. An article about this lease appeared in a recent issue of International Wildlife.

Q: *What is the general reaction of landowners when you approach them about conserving habitat?*

M.P.: Most landowners are very enlightened about conservation matters but have not realized the significance of their land. They have a sense of personal satisfaction in protecting habitat for wildlife.

We recognize that habitat loss is a major problem - both locally and globally, and every effort must be made to inform farmers and other landowners of the necessity to conserve and protect habitat.

Thanks Myrna for your time. I would like to congratulate the Red Deer River Naturalists for being so active in conservation issues and initiating programs and undertaking innovative projects. It certainly is a record that all of you can be proud of. Keep up the good work!

John Rintoul, Natural Areas Program

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS PROJECT

The Alberta Bird Atlas (A.B.A.P.) is a project of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN). FAN is an association of individuals and nature clubs interested in furthering the natural history objectives of Alberta.

The Alberta Bird Atlas Project is a five year long, provincial survey that was initiated in 1987. Its aims are to:

- fill the gap pertaining to the distribution of breeding birds and areas of significant concentrations;
- determine which species are scarce and the limits of their range;
- provide sound baseline data which can be used for wildlife management programs, environmental assessments, conservation projects and personal enjoyment.

By becoming a volunteer for the Alberta Bird Atlas Project, Natural Areas' volunteer stewards cannot only add valuable knowledge about the status of birds in Alberta to the Project, but help in the expanding of the biophysical information for the Natural Areas.

"You don't have to be a birder 'now' to get involved."

Many bird courses are available. Beginners can be teamed up with more skilled birders to improve their skill to ensure that their first-hand field experience is rewarding.

If you wish to become involved and would like more information write:

Alberta Bird Atlas Project
c/o Provincial Museum of Alberta
12845 - 102 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5N 0M6

Natural Areas Program
4th flr, South Tower
9915-108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2C9
Telephone 427-5209



RUFFED GROUSE

Braced on a log, a male ruffed grouse beats its wings in the air, producing an extraordinary muffled sound which accelerates to a booming drum roll that can be heard 1/4 mile (0.4 km.) away. At the climax the wings increase to a rate of 20 strokes per second. The Ruffed Grouse is at home in most Natural Areas with deciduous or mixed forests. Although their drumming is primarily used for spring courtship, ruffed grouse may be heard at any time throughout the year.